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E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/30/2016  
TAGS: [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [KPAO](#) [MO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)  
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR VISIT TO MOROCCO OF U/S KAREN  
HUGHES

REF: A. RABAT 398  
[B](#). RABAT 522

Classified By: DCM Wayne J. Bush for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) The US Mission warmly welcomes your upcoming visit to Morocco. Your visit comes as we and the Moroccan government are further energizing the substantial reinvigoration of bilateral relations that has taken place since the May 2003 terrorist attacks in Casablanca. Since the 2003 attacks, Morocco has strengthened its commitment to working with the international community to fight global terrorism and promote widespread reforms, and cooperation with the US on both of these fronts is excellent. We hope that your activities in Morocco, which will highlight many aspects of the US-Morocco partnership, will underscore to the Moroccan public the importance the US attaches to our relationship with Morocco and demonstrate interest in the lives of ordinary Moroccans. Most importantly, your program has been designed to provide illustrations of the components of our proposed pilot public diplomacy strategy to combat violent extremism. The purpose of this message is to provide background information on overall US-Moroccan relations.

Reform

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[1](#)2. (C) Morocco is a regional leader in reform, and the Moroccan leadership views reform and religious tolerance as essential components in combating extremism and terrorism. As such, and in keeping with the King's vision of a modern monarchy, Morocco is pressing internal reform on all fronts: on the political front, with recently passed legislation to reform Moroccan political parties; in women's rights through implementation of the family code (the "Moudawana") that significantly boosts the rights of women and children; in the media, with reform of the audiovisual sector; in education, where USAID has launched a \$40 million five-year program and the GOM is partnering with the World Bank for a major push on primary education; in the economic realm, with FTA implementation and liberalization of the banking/financial sector; and, in the religious field, where Morocco's Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs is restructuring mosques and Islamic education to promote tolerance and moderation. Morocco's Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER),

established to examine human rights abuses between 1956 and 1999, completed its mandate in November 2005 and shortly thereafter submitted its final report to the King, who decreed that the findings would be made public, including the commission's recommendations. Despite the GOM's efforts, however, we hear persistent concerns that change is not happening fast enough and that reform is almost entirely driven by the Palace.

13. (C) The Ministry of Endowments and Islamic Affairs' recent graduation of 150 male imams and 50 female "mourchidats" (guides) has drawn much national and international attention compelling Minister Ahmed Toufiq to clarify that the "mourchidats" will not be responsible for the same duties as the male imams. In a public declaration in late May, Toufiq emphasized that an imam's "mission" is regulated by the sharia (Islamic law) and should not be confused with the role of mourchidat. He stressed that the role of imam is to be reserved exclusively for men. Instead, the 50 female graduates will be in charge of "operating in the mosques," which will include teaching. Both imams and mourchidats will be able to give courses in different "Islamic sciences," and to teach the concepts of the sharia (with imams teaching imams and mourchidats training mourchidats). The second tranche of candidates, 160 men and 60 women, began their annual program on May 15. We hope to be able to send a select few of the mourchidats and imams to the US on an International Visitor Leadership Program this coming year.

14. (SBU) The USG actively supports many of Morocco's reform efforts, including through direct funding. Morocco is a major recipient of funding through the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI), which funds projects in

Morocco that promote democracy and good governance, economic growth, education, and women's empowerment. Morocco also receives money from the US through economic support funds as well as development assistance. In FY 2006, USAID programs were funded at \$21.6 million. This is a significant reduction from the amounts approved by the Principals Committee following the 2003 bombings. However, the Millennium Challenge Corporation is currently negotiating a compact with Morocco that may be valued at more than \$500 million over five years.

#### Public Diplomacy

15. (SBU) Despite deep concerns among many Moroccans about aspects of our foreign policy in the Middle East, we continue to find Morocco a fertile ground for US public diplomacy efforts. Moroccans openly welcome contact with the United States and Americans, even if they disagree staunchly with our policies regarding Iraq and Israel/Palestine. The sister city relationship between Casablanca and Chicago is vibrant and regarded as a model for sister city relationships. A military exercise in southern Morocco this weekend has drawn favorable press coverage. We look forward to continuing to work with your staff on our public diplomacy strategy, as we jointly seek more and better ways to advance understanding and support for the US.

#### Press Freedom

16. (C) While Morocco's reforms remain largely on track, press freedom continues to be a problematic area and lags behind Western standards. A handful of newspapers have been handed stiff fines recently stemming from charges of libel (reftels). While this may represent an improvement from the recent practice of sending journalists to jail (we are not aware of any journalists currently in prison), such fines are tantamount to forcing publications out of business. This is an issue we follow closely and have raised with the GOM on numerous occasions. On a more positive note, earlier this month operating licenses were granted to eleven new private radio stations and one new French-Moroccan television

station.

#### Middle East: the Palestinians, Iraq, Iran

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¶17. (C) Morocco continues to be a moderating voice in the Middle East. Mahmoud Abbas visited Morocco April 12-15. In what the GOM considered a "working visit," the King offered to provide the Palestinians a new embassy in Rabat. However, the GOM refused an official visit by Hamas Secretary General Khaled Mishal. King Mohammed met with Shimon Peres in Madrid last year and one of the King's top advisors (and a leader of the Moroccan Jewish community), Andre Azoulay, visited Israel last November, where the GOI extended an invitation for King Mohammed to visit. However, the Israeli liaison office in Rabat, closed during the second intifada, remains shuttered. Most recently the GOM, through the Mohammed VI Foundation for Solidarity and at the King's urging, sent a large shipment of humanitarian aid to help support the Palestinian people.

¶18. (C) The Government of Morocco continues to play a discreet but supportive role in Iraq. Morocco has welcomed some key events in Iraq, but is inconsistent in publicly supporting major political developments; the GOM has said nothing in public, for example, about Iraq's new government and constitution. The Moroccan MFA has trained Iraqi diplomats in Morocco. The GOM, however, has not publicly condemned the terrorist attacks in Iraq in the same way it has condemned similar attacks elsewhere. Two employees of the Moroccan Embassy in Baghdad are currently being held hostage, and there have been strong public demonstrations of support for them, and against the kidnappers, from the King and the Moroccan people, but their capture is dragging on with no apparent resolution.

¶19. (C) The Iranian Vice President for Legal and

Parliamentary Affairs visited Morocco in early January and was received by PM Jettou. While the Moroccans support the right of Iran to develop nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, the GOM has said that it made clear to VP Musavi that Iran must comply with international law and non-proliferation conventions. Morocco supports US efforts to deal with the issue multilaterally and believes another military confrontation must be avoided at all costs. The GOM is also concerned about Iranian "meddling" in Iraq.

#### Western Sahara and Algeria

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¶10. (C) Morocco's relations with Algeria are sour with no immediate prospects for improvement. There are quiet contacts between the two countries, but relations at the most senior levels are not warm. The Western Sahara issue remains a key obstacle in improving relations; without a resolution to this long-standing dispute, limited Moroccan resources that could be utilized more productively elsewhere will go to maintaining a security environment in the territory, where two-thirds of the Moroccan army is deployed. Algeria continues to insist on a solution to the Western Sahara that allows for self-determination for the Sahrawi people, while Morocco insists the territory is an integral part of the Kingdom and will consider autonomy for the territory but staunchly rejects any option that allows for the possibility of independence.

¶11. (C) We continue to urge Morocco and Algeria to improve their dialogue and avoid negative public rhetoric. We contribute to the annual budget of MINURSO, the peacekeeping force in the territory, and support confidence-building measures such as family visits between Moroccan and Polisario-controlled areas. Senator Lugar visited Morocco and Algeria in August 2005 to oversee the release of the remaining 404 POWs held by the Polisario, a substantial humanitarian contribution facilitated by the US, with tremendous positive public diplomacy impact.

#### Economic Issues: FTA and Anti-Money Laundering

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¶12. (SBU) We are pleased with the initial successes of the FTA during the first months of implementation, particularly the increased foreign direct investment in the textile and garment sector. Several small irritations have arisen with regard to agricultural trade, however. We hope that we can work together in the cooperative spirit of the accord to open up markets and liberalize sectors, thus making the FTA a true victory for both countries.

¶13. (SBU) While we were encouraged by the Council of Government's passage of draft anti-money laundering legislation in April, as it is a keystone of our counter-terrorism finance efforts we would like to see timely Council of Ministers and Parliamentary approval of the law. INL has set aside \$800 thousand to help equip a Financial Intelligence Unit and help train its personnel. Disbursement of these and other US. funds (including FBI training and assistance that may be reprogrammed for Algeria) is contingent on passage of the AML law. Morocco's MENA-FATF peer review is scheduled for November 2006.

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